

THE BELMONT

NEW SERIES, VOL. 3, NO. 22.

ST. CLAIRSVILLE, OHIO, THURSDAY, MAY 26, 1859.

[WHOLE NO. 1083]

An Interesting Tale.

JOHN WALTON'S FARM.

"Hain't you better subscribe for it?"
"I tell you, no. I hain't got the money to spare. And, if I had, I hain't got the time to waste over newspapers," said Eben Sawyer, with some emphasis.
"But you will gain much information from it in the course of a year, sir," pursued John Walton.
"I tell you, I don't want it!"
"Well, what say you, Mr. Grummet?"
"No, sir!" This was spoken so flatly and bluntly that Walton said no more; but folded up the prospectus of a periodical which he had with him, and then turned away.

Eben Sawyer and Ben Grummet were two old farmers, that, in old days, though they had only reached the middle age of life, and after their young neighbor had gone they expressed their opinions concerning him.

"Hain't never make a farmer," said Sawyer, with a shake of his head. "He spends too much time over them papers and books of his'n. He's a fettle nite above farmin', in my opinion."

"Them's my sentiments," responded Grummet. "I tell you, Eben, the man that thinks to make a livin' on a farm in this section, has got to work for it."

At this juncture, Sam Bancroft came along. He was another native of the district.

"We was just talkin' about young Walton," said Sawyer.

"I've just come from there," replied Sam. "He has been workin' me to sign for a paper; but he couldn't come it."

"Hain't he so hard on us? Hain't he gittin' a leetle too high for a farmer?"

"He's rippin' his barnfloor up," said Bancroft.

"Ripin' the floor up?" repeated Grummet.

"Why—Mr. Amesen had the whole floor put down new only three years ago."

"The floor down? I mean," pursued Bancroft. "He's got a carpenter up from the village; and two hired men are helpin'."

"Wh—! I guess he'll make a farmer!"

And so they all guessed—with a reservation. In short, there was something highly ridiculous in the thought of a man's thinking to be a farmer and a student at the same time; and all sorts of objects were discharged over it.

John Walton was a young man—some five-and-twenty, and though he had been born in the neighborhood, yet much of his life had been spent in other sections of the country. His parents both died when he was quite young, and his father's farm passed into the hands of a Mr. Amesen. But now John had married, and he meant to be a farmer; and his thoughts naturally turned to the old homestead. He found Amesen willing to sell, and he bought—paying two thousand dollars down, and giving a note and mortgage for five hundred, which had been cashed by Mr. Piddon.

This farming district was upon a broad ridge of land, which had been cleared for a great many years; and though they were the handsomest, and smoothest looking farms in town, yet they were by no means the best.

The summit of the ridge was crowned by a ledge of granite, and the soil, over the whole broad swell, was more or less wet and cold. This was particularly the case with John Walton's farm, some portions of it being wholly unfit for cultivation. There was one field of over twenty acres—one of the smoothest and prettiest located fields in town—which was never fit for plowing.

The soil was so wet and heavy that it could not be worked at any advantage. It had been mowed year after year, yielding about three-quarters of a ton to the acre of poor wild, weedy hay. Yet there were other sections which were good, and Mr. Amesen had gained fair crops while he lived there.

Ben Grummet had a curiosity to see what was going on in John's barn; so he dropped in there. He found that the whole of the lower where the cattle stood, had been torn up, and that they were digging a wide, deep trench the whole length of the tie-up.

"What on earth is all this for?" asked Ben.

"Why, returned Walton, who was busy in superintending the work, and also in working himself, 'I am having a place fixed here for making manure. I mean to fill this trench up with good mud, and thus save the liquid which have heretofore been lost. I think, by proper management, I can get full double the quantity of manure which others have got on this place.'"

"Do ye?" said Grummet sarcastically.

"Yes," returned the young man, "it is a fact that the liquid manure, and it is saved, would fully equal the solids, both in bulk and value; and when combined with well rotted mud, and other articles which shall take up and retain all the moisture, I feel sure that they will afford more fertilizing powers and properties than the solid manure can."

"You don't say so? Where d'ye learn all that?"

"Partly from reading and partly from observation," answered John, smiling at his good neighbor's open sarcasm.

"I don't suppose it costs anything to do all this?"

"O, yes—it will cost me considerable before I get through."

"Yes—I should rather calculate it would!" Ben Grummet spoke this very slowly, and with a great deal of meaning; and when he had looked on a few minutes longer he went away.

"I want," he cried, as he met Sawyer, shortly afterwards, "John Walton's a regular hifalutin'!" He's got a notion as nigh to hain' crazy as a man can be!"

"Eh! crazy, Ben?"

"O—! don't mean, rally up!" like them folks that has had to be sent to the insane asylum; but he's got his head full of all sorts of nonsense. He's got his tip up for all town away, and a trench dug there big enough to hold more'n twenty cart-loads of dirt."

"But hain't nature's he going to do?"

"Why—hain't a 'goin' to save the liquid, as he calls 'em? And he's got to put in something to take up the—the—voluntary parts."

"Voluntary parts!—What's them, Ben?"

"It was no somethin'." But I don't know.

I wouldn't ask him. I s'pose he jest used the outlandish words to git me to ask him what it meant—then he'd show off his learnin'! But I wasn't no green."

"I wonder if he thinks he's a comin' here to learn us old farmers how to work?" said Sawyer, rather indignantly.

"I guess he thinks so," returned Grummet.

"Then I guess he'll find out his mistake," added the other. "Jes' you mark my words, Ben, he'll be flat on his back afore two years is out!"

And these were not the only ones who looked for the same thing. The idea of a man's coming there with any such unfledged notions was absurd. Their fathers, and their fathers' fathers, had worked on that ridge, and they wanted nothing better than what their honored progenitors had before them.

Autumn came, and after John Walton had mowed over the twenty-acre field, getting hardly any enough to pay for the labor, he set men at work digging deep trenches all over it. He had two dug longwise, running up and down the slope; and then he dug quite a number running across these.

They were quite deep and broad, and, indeed, he had seen nearly all the stones that had been found in the fields.

"A pooty extensive way of gettin' rid o' rocks," remarked Grummet.

"It's a better place for them than on a surface, isn't it?" returned Walton, with a smile.

"Mebbe. But what on earth are ye doing it for?"

"Why—I'm going to see if under-draining won't improve the land."

"Under-draining? What's that?"

"It's simply draining off the water from the surface. This land is cold and wet; but if I can get the water to drain off among these rocks, the sun warm the surface, and give me a good crop of soil here."

But it looked very foolish to Ben Grummet. He believed that what was the nature of the soil couldn't be altered. However, the young man made his trench—tumbled in the rocks—filled in on top with the soil he had originally removed; and then let it lie for itself a while.

And he could see that the soil had already changed wonderfully. After this he had already cut his way to the mud swamp, and went to hauling out that article, which he deposited in various places, as he deemed proper.

"That's a curious contrivance," said Sam Bancroft. He and Ben Grummet had been at work for Walton at hauling mud. He alluded to a large vat back of the house into which ran a spout from the sink. This vat was capable of holding several cart loads of stuff, and was already full.

"That's a compost vat," explained Walton, who had overheard the remark. "All the slop from the house—the soap suds and such stuff, which most people waste—I save by this means, and turn it to good account; and instead of throwing a way refuse matter, I put it in here, and let it rot and ferment, and make manure."

"But what's this charcoal dust for?"

"It answers two purposes, though by only one office. It takes up the ammonia and other volatile matter, thus holding them for fertilizing agents, at the same time prevents the disagreeable effluvia which would otherwise arise from such a fermenting mass."

"That all sounds very pooty," remarked Ben, after Walton had told them; "but let me jes' tell you I don't pay! He'd better let his fangles alone, if he ever expects to make a livin' at farmin'!"

Before the ground froze up, Walton threw out most of the mud of his tie-up, which had become well saturated, and filled the trench up anew.

The old settlers upon the ridge had set out a great many apple-trees, and made a great deal of cider; but the fruit was mostly wild, and of an inferior quality. When Spring came, Walton went to some of his neighbors, and asked them to go in with him, and send him some good seedlings to graft upon their apple trees. He explained to them just the plan he had formed for his own orchard. He had engaged a competent man to come and do the work of grafting, and while they were at it, it would be cheaper to get grafts enough for the whole neighborhood.

"How much will it cost you?" asked Sawyer.

"Why," returned Walton, "I'm going into mine pretty thoroughly. My orchard is a very large one, as yours is; and, like yours, the trees are mostly thin and vigorous—or could be made so—but with very poor fruit. I mean to make a thorough thing of it, and shall probably expend a hundred dollars this Spring."

"What! A hundred dollars!—In your orchard?"

"Yes." It was of no use. The old orchards were just such as their fathers had, and they were good enough. So Walton went at it alone, and he had his trees all pruned and dressed, and nearly all of them grafted to such fruit as he thought would bear best, and sell best.

A little later, and Ben Grummet had occasion to open his eyes. He found that John Walton had contrived to have a hundred and forty full loads of manure, all of which had been made within the year. However, he finally shook his head, and said, "well—we'll see it it's good for anything."

A little while later, and the grass began to spring up on the twenty-acre lot, and had never sprung up before. The two acres, which had been plowed, harrowed up light and fine, bore the best crop of corn that was raised on the whole ridge; and all the manure put upon it was some which had been manured.

And so the time wore on, and John Walton was continually studying how to improve his farm. At the expiration of a few years the new sections had grown large and strong in his orchard, and began to bear fruit. He had taken care of his trees, and they were about ready to return him interest for the labor.

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Eben Sawyer as Ben Grummet and Sam Bancroft came into his house one cool Autumn evening, and the three filled their mugs with new cider, "have you heard about John Walton's apples?"

"I know there was a man up to look at 'em," returned Ben; "but I hain't heard no more."

"Well—I was there, and heard the whole on't—so I know—I never would have thought it. An orchard turn out like that!"

"But how much was it?"

"Why—Walton was offered—cash right down—five hundred and thirty dollars for the apples he's got on hand; and he tells me that he sent nearly two hundred dollars' worth of early fruit a month or more ago."

"It was wonderful—more than wonderful. But they had to believe it."

"And jes' look at that twenty-acre field, said Bancroft. "Ten years ago it wouldn't hardly pay for mowing. It didn't bear much else but podgum. Now look at it. Think o' the corn and what he's raised there; and this year he cut more'n forty tons of good hay from it!"

"But that ain't half," interrupted Sawyer. "Look at the stock he keeps, and jes' see what prices he gets for his cows and oxen. We laughed at him when he paid so much for the new breeds of sheep and cattle he now has. We, he tells me, he's cleared over a thousand dollars this year on his stock."

At this moment Mr. Walton came in. He had grown older, and was somewhat stouter, than when he first settled upon the ridge, and became a farmer; and his neighbors had ceased to question his capacity, and had come to honor and respect him.

"We was jes' talking about you, Mr. Walton," said Sawyer.

"Ah," returned John, as he took a seat by the fire. "I hope you found nothing bad to say of me?"

"Not a bit of it. We was talking about the wonderful improvements you've made on the old place, and of the money you make."

"And do you think it wonderful?"

"But ain't it?"

And pry up the great big chunks of gold that weigh half a ton or so, and are so thick that you can't get them out without danger of breaking your legs, and I am going up to a ravine, where all I have to do is to go to the top of a high mountain and roll it down to the river."

The country here is fine, but the winds are awful. My boys got so light with wind, that I can only keep them by me, or together, by piling lumps of gold, as big as mallets, on their shirt tails, as the little innocents sit down on the grass to play. Everything is grown here. I can raise twenty bushels of wheat to the acre. Oranges, lemons, and all such colored fruits grow wild here; while melons, peaches, apples, peaches and apple dumplings are so plenty that they find no market."

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"And that mud and compost arrangement," suggested Sawyer.

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"And I'm going into it."

"So am I!"

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The Milwaukee News publishes a letter from John Smith, a well known citizen of Wisconsin, from which we clip the following extract. We fear, however, the writer has given great latitude to his pen:

There is gold here—lots of it. The gofers dig it out of the ground by the bushel, and in the moonlight the whole earth for miles around looks like heaven with its myriad stars, or like a pretty girl with yellow freckles. The woodchucks dig out bushes and bushes of it, and the snakes in this country look like gold ones from crawling among gold chunks. It is found in all sized pieces, from the size of a hen's egg up to the size of a large stone, and of the finest quality. We have asked to get what they lay down on an acre of ground, and have twenty-two piles about as big as a large sized haystack. Last night two hundred Indians came to rob us of a set of silver spoons and a fine comb that my wife had to use on the children, and we barricaded our house with rocks of gold till they could not gain admittance, and were forced to beg to make friends with us.

I am going to leave these diggings for a better one. It is too much trouble to tug

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